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ABSTRACT

This study investigated African-American student response to images of African-Americans in picture books. Study participants included 20 fifth-grade students, 9 girls and 11 boys. The study used five picture books featuring African-Americans as main characters and ranked the books on a continuum from "most positive" to "most negative" images. Criteria are detailed. Students were read the five books and then asked to complete a survey. Findings indicate that presence of stereotypical images does not affect which books students prefer to read. While identifying stereotypical features of images, students did not make judgments based on the offensive nature of these features. They were not aware of the context in which stereotypes existed, but they often disliked the same racist, stereotypical images. These findings suggest the need for interventions by teachers. An appendix includes the study questionnaire. (Contains 13 tables and 23 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Running head: AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENT RESPONSE TO IMAGES

African-American Student Response to Images of African-Americans in Children's Picture Books

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Abstract

This study investigated African-American student response to images of African-Americans in picture books. Study participants included twenty fifth grade students, nine girls and eleven boys. The study used five picture books featuring African-Americans as main characters and ranked on a continuum from "most positive" to "most negative" images (criteria included in methods section). Students were read the five books and then asked to complete a survey. Discussion sessions were held after reading each book. Findings indicate that presence of stereotypical images do not affect which books students prefer to read. While identifying stereotypical features of images, students did not make judgements based on the offensive nature of these features.

Introduction

During the Spring of 1997, one of the two researchers, Ray McKenzie, conducted an independent study entitled, "African-American Images in Children's Books." The study focused on picture books written within the last ten years and explored the representation of African-American characters illustrated in these various picture books. Strands of derogatory images that developed in books of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were identified and those older books, which included Little Black Sambo (Bannerman, 1923), Young Folks' Uncle Tom's Cabin (Boylan, 1910), and Huckleberry Finn (Twain, 1885), were compared with modern books, including Pink and Say (Polacco, 1994), Amazing Grace (Hoffman, 1991), Sam and the Tigers (Lester, 1996), Yo! Yes? (Raschka, 1993), and others, to see if the same stereotypical images persisted. The researcher observed that though great progress had been made, the same images such as the buffoon, the exaggeration of facial and bodily features, as well as inordinate nude or unclothed pictures of black characters still existed in these modern texts (McKenzie, 1997).

Likewise, the second researcher, Adrienne Johnstone, also had conducted an independent project entitled, "Early Readers' Understanding of Character and Theme: An Exploratory Study." That particular study focused on how children interact with the books they read and the role that characters and themes play in fostering that interaction (Johnstone, 1997). In response to both of these earlier studies, the researchers designed this current project as a natural merging and extension of their former work. The major question the research was designed to explore asks whether or not representations of African-American characters in picture books affect which books African-American children prefer to read. Furthermore, we were seeking to determine the level at which students interact with the pictures surrounding the text, and if that interaction, based on

the representations of African-Americans, plays a major role in the books that black children select for reading and re-reading.

In addition to that focus, the investigation should provide some suggestions to help teachers become more aware of factors to consider when selecting books for classroom use which represent a variety of cultures and experiences. Whether or not students seem to make "wise" judgements concerning the books they read based on the images they contain, teachers must remain informed and aware of images that could be detrimental to student self-concept or those representations which may perpetuate stereotypes and negative images of members of specific cultures. Furthermore, teachers need to be cognizant of these issues in order to provide books with culturally accurate and authentic images which serve a large role in educating and informing students about the variety of cultures they inevitably will encounter.

In order to answer our questions, we designed both quantitative and qualitative measures to collect a full and meaningful range of responses from children. For quantitative measure, the students were asked to complete very brief surveys in response to the books they read which looked at both whether they thought the book had good illustrations and if they would like to read the book again on their own. In addition, students completed a final survey wherein they were asked to rank the books they had read. To provide qualitative information, students participated in discussion groups of about four to five students which enabled them to express reasonings for liking or disliking books and respond to questions about the illustrations, illustrators, and story-lines of the books in our study.

Literature Review

Many educators and researchers have written critical work on the history and development of African-American characters in children's literature. Guiding and

informing the development of our current research were a number of critical essays and books, as well as educational research, aimed at evaluation of the image of the African-American child in children's literature. Research in the field of text interaction and story knowledge provided a background to our research and helped shape and refine the direction of the current study. Critical essays informed our decisions about the books we chose to include in the research text set (see Method).

Rudine Sims Bishop writes, "A picture book integrates text and illustrations into an artistic whole; the pictures are as important as the text. Thus, the picture book illustrator plays a critical role in the creation of the images of African-Americans that are offered to children through their books" (Bishop, 1990: 558). What kinds of critical judgments are African-American children able to make about the images presented in a text? Research, to date, has been nearly silent on the response of the child reader to images. We do not know what kinds of judgments students are able to make because the majority of research into readers' responses to images and literature has focused on adult and young adult readers. Their reactions to images of varying ethnicities and cultures in literature has been of increasing interest to educational researchers in the last ten years (see Altieri, 1996; Baker, 1990; Lee, 1985).

Recent studies of children's response have found that first grade children do not understand abstract messages but were "concrete" and "practical" in evaluation of stories (Trousdale and Everett, 1994). Second grade students were unable to consistently understand motivation of characters (Johnstone, 1997). In looking at children's book preferences "research has consistently shown that the most popular books portray the world of childhood much the same as children see it, while the least popular books show a different view" (Lambert, 1994: 8). In other words, we would expect students to prefer books that they can relate to.

Few studies have sought to explore the emergence of student ability to make informed judgments about children's texts. While they may not posses the vocabulary for classifying and evaluating images, the African-American child reader's ability to seek out or to recognize "accuracy and authenticity" (Bishop in Lindgren, 1991: 31) in images of themselves may be important in the development of self-esteem and of appreciation of the breadth of their own culture.

Rudine Sims Bishop's landmark study Shadow and Substance (1982) examined the presentation of African-American characters in literature for children. Bishop more recently wrote that were she to conduct a similar study today, she would look more closely at illustrations, as they may contain "some motifs, elements, or stylistic markers" that would aid in categorization and more thorough evaluation of the overall story (Bishop in Lindgren, 1991: 33). We have attempted to place the focus on illustrations as an equal component and transmitter of the overall message of a children's books. We also have attempted to put the evaluation in the hands of the African-American readers in order to gain information about their evaluative abilities and preference.

Variable Operationalization

"Positive images" refers to images which are generally free of stereotype, authentic, and realistic.

"Negative images" refers to images which are stereotypical, demonstrative of racial bias, completely inauthentic and unrealistic.

"Positive" and "negative" should be viewed as on a continuum.

Research Questions

Research Q1: Do "positive" or "negative" images of African-American characters in picture books affect which picture books African-American children prefer to read?

Research Q2: At what level do students interact with the illustrations?

Research Q3 : What implications do the messages African-American children receive from images of African-Americans in picture books have for teachers?

Method

Participants

Subjects were drawn from an "upper elementary" school in a small city. The school population is 52% African-American. The remaining 48% of students are white and other ethnic minority. Participant students were drawn from two fifth grade classes. All of the African-American students in the two classes participated, for a total of twenty subjects. The sample contained eleven females and nine males. Eight subjects were currently reading at or above grade level while the remaining twelve read below grade level at the time of the study. Reading levels were determined by the students' Humanities teacher.

Materials

Text Set Construction

Five books were selected for use in this study: Amazing Grace, Yo! Yes?, The Snowy Day (1963), Sam and the Tigers, and Little Black Sambo. The selected books range along a continuum, from Amazing Grace, a book that presents overall positive images of African-Americans, to Little Black Sambo, a turn of the century children's tale brimming over with stereotypical images of black people as "buffoons" and "mammies" (Sims, 1982).

Books were selected based on several criteria. First, length of story was considered. Selected books could be read in a maximum of ten minutes. Second, student interest was considered. Students were familiar with many of these books which were

well known and widely published. Third, the text set included both African-American and white illustrators.

The researchers ranked the books in order to have a framework in which to compare student and researcher evaluations. While comparison of student and researcher assessments is not the most important finding of this study, it was a useful tool for general analysis and for comparing across specific story illustration elements.

Little Black Sambo was the "worst" illustrated book in the text set. Helen Bannerman's illustrations represent the worst in physical stereotypes of African-American people. There are clear examples of the "comic Negro" (MacCann, 1985) and the "insatiable appetite" (Sims, 1982) in this text. Sambo is "simian-like" with red lips and protruding eyes (Harris, 1990).

Amazing Grace was selected as the "best" illustrated book in the sample. While an argument can be made that the stereotype of the African-American child as naked is still present in this book, it has been praised for its lifelike watercolor illustrations, realistic representations of hair texture and skin color. The illustrations and text combined relay the message to children that neither race nor gender should be barriers to any achievement, representing what Sims would call the "culturally conscious" stream in African-American children's literature.

Rankings for the other three books in the text set were determined after careful reading of criticism in the field of African-American children's literature. Tway (1989) uses a four-pronged test for quality in multicultural literature, individually assessing accuracy, authenticity, objectivity, and literary quality of literature. Research judged individual books based on the accuracy and authenticity of the images of African-Americans: Could the characters be representations of real people, individuals, or were they charicatures or stereotypes of people? The images in Sam and the Tigers contain a great deal of accurate detail. The choices Pinkney made about skin tone, hair texture and

style, facial features, and clothing lend a greater degree of authenticity to the main character in this retelling of Little Black Sambo, a character who, in the words of author Julius Lester (1996:35), "...was a black hero, but his name and how he was depicted took away his heroic status...." In Sam and the Tigers, while the insatiable appetite aspect remains, the nudity, racist protagonist name, and stereotypical images have all been removed. For these reasons, Sam and the Tigers was ranked second.

Tom Feelings (in Lindgren, 1991:46) has written that African-American people generally create the most positive, more authentic illustrations of African-Americans. Intimate knowledge of the culture that is to be illustrated is required to create images not only of "what it is but what is possible." Of The Snowy Day, Feelings (1991:50) wrote that while the book was "beautifully done...if you look at the profiles carefully, you will see that all Keats had to do was take out that brown color, and he'd have a white child. If the form is not clear, how can the content ring true?" The Snowy Day was an important book; at the time of its original publication in 1963, it was the very first children's book to feature an African-American protagonist. Rudine Sims would place Keats' book in the "melting pot" category of children's literature. These books do not address social issues, nor highlight anything specific to African-American culture. Instead they seek to show that "people are people are people" (Sims, 1982). While important for its presentation of an African-American boy at the center of the tale and, if anything, innocuous in its omission of "issues," the concerns about the authenticity and positivity of the images led researchers to rank this book as third.

In selecting the fourth ranked book, researchers considered evidence of old stereotypes which persist in children's literature today (McKenzie, 1997). Yo! Yes? is a book which, while perhaps uplifting in theme, is made problematic by the illustrations in the story. The greatest difficulty in assessing the imagery of Yo! Yes? is the fact that there are so few images in the story. By limiting the number of characters in this simple

tale to two, author and illustrator Chris Raschka creates images which easily translate into representations of the total people Raschka is attempting to present. The African-American character in this tale of burgeoning friendship across ethnic barriers is loud, speaks in slang, dresses sloppily in baggy clothes, and is initially intimidating to the other character, who is white. The white character is dressed neatly, in cardigan and sandals, and speaks in Standard English. Stereotypical dress and speech are both present here, juxtaposed against an image of a more conservative white child. For these reasons, Yo! Yes? was ranked fourth in our text set.

Procedures

Prior to data collection, the researchers and students participated in an introductory session designed to direct subjects to attend to images in general and to physical characteristics more specifically. A selection of photographs from magazine articles and advertisements depicting African-Americans were shared with participants. The researchers lead a discussion in which students were asked to describe and talk about hair, clothing, facial features color, shape, and texture. This session had the benefits of both introducing students to the types of questions students would be answering during research and developing rapport between researchers and subjects.

Two researchers conducted this study. Both participated in the introduction session. Both researchers also read each of the books and lead discussion sections. Students were split into small groups of four or five, each with one of the researchers. All students had the chance to read and talk with both researchers several times during the course of the study. Over a period of five days, the books were read to the students, beginning with Yo! Yes? And concluding with Little Black Sambo. As this was the book with the most offensive images, it was presented as one of the last books, so that students would be familiar with the discussion format and the questions that would be

asked of them. Following the reading aloud of the book by a researcher, student response data was collected.

It was the researchers' intention to mimic read-aloud sessions that take place in the classroom as much as possible. This study aimed to, as Trousdale and Everett (1994:2) wrote, "...place African-American children in a situation that simulated the reading aloud that took place in [the] classroom, but in a more intimate and informal atmosphere."

Quantitative Data

Two written questionnaires were prepared for participants. The first was administered to students after hearing a book, in one of two conditions: a) before small group discussion or b) after small group discussion. This first questionnaire was brief, and asked to students to rate the story, the illustrations, and their preferences for seeing and hearing the book again (see appendix A).

The second questionnaire was to be completed at the end of the research, after all books had been read and discussed (see appendix B). This questionnaire asked for an overall ranking of all five books and student preferences on several measures, including "favorite book" and "worst illustrations." Two written response questions were also asked.

Q1. If you had to mail one of these books to a white child in Vermont, whom you had never met and African-American person, which book would you select and why?

Q2. If you had to choose one of these books to read to a little brother, little sister, or little cousin, which book would you choose and why?

Due to the limited reading ability of some of the students, both questionnaires were discussed and read with students prior to completion.

Qualitative Data

A list of discussion questions were prepared and used to elicit student response about the illustrations in the books (see appendix C). Each discussion session began with the reading of a positive critical response to the book. The researchers selected criticism and quotations from both literary review sources and critical writing on children's literature to use during discussion. Students were asked to respond to the quote from "someone who reviewed the book." The questions that followed address illustration preference and the presence of any images that made students uncomfortable or that they disliked. These questions were the same for each book. Researchers then introduced a negative critical response to the book and asked students to respond. Follow-up questions were written to determine student assumptions about illustrators and included, "do you think this illustrator is familiar with African-Americans?" and "do you think this illustrator is African-American?" Students also stated whether or not they thought the book was useful or good to have in the classroom. Each discussion session was audio recorded and transcribed.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Overall Preference

Data collected through questionnaires were coded and analyzed. From data analysis alone, it is clear that students prefer Amazing Grace to all the other books. The modal student ranking of the books, nearly corresponds to the researcher ranking (from "most positive" to "most negative" illustrations): Amazing Grace, Sam and the Tigers, The Snowy Day, Yo! Yes?, and Little Black Sambo. As stated above, our ranking is based on quality or offensiveness of images, determined with the use of both critical literature and the researchers own opinions about the imagery presented in the books.

63% of subjects, ranked Amazing Grace first, 52% of subjects selected Sam and the Tigers as second. The Snowy Day and Yo! Yes? Both received 31.6% of responses as a third choice book while The Snowy Day was most often selected as the fourth book (42.1% of responses). The majority of students, 55.6%, selected Little Black Sambo as number five.

Individual books

Yo! Yes? : Students were asked to indicate their opinions about the illustrations in each book by selecting a score from one to seven on a Likert scale from "horrible pictures" to "excellent" (see appendix 1). Responses to this book were divided all along the scale. Three students had "no opinion" about the illustrations in Yo! Yes?. 38.9% believed the illustrations were "okay" or "horrible." Eight students, 44.5% of the sample responding to this question, believed the illustrations to be "pretty good" to "excellent" (from 5 to 7 on the scale). The median response was 4 and the modal response was 3.

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insert table 1 here

77.8% of the students would like to read Yo! Yes? again if given the chance while 22.2% of the sample responding to this question, 4 students, would not like to hear the book again.

The Snowy Day : This book appeared to be least interesting to the majority of students. Responses to illustrations were widely distributed; both the mode and the median score were 3 "okay." 45% of students selected "okay" and 1 student, 5% of the sample, had "no opinion." Each of the other response categories was selected by 10% of the sample.

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insert table 2 here

40% of students were not interested in reading The Snowy Day again. 60% would want to read the book again if given the chance.

Amazing Grace : The illustrations in this book were most favorably evaluated among students. 41.2% ranked the illustrations as "excellent." The median response was 6 "really good," and the modal response was 7 "excellent." No students believed the illustrations were "horrible."

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insert table 3 here (s eval grace)

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16 of 19 students who responded to this question ranked it from "okay" to "excellent while only 5.9% of students "didn't like" the pictures. Nearly all students would like to hear Amazing Grace again if given the chance. 82.4% responded "yes" when asked if they would like to read the book again.

Sam and the Tigers : The illustrations in Sam and the Tigers also were evaluated favorably by students. The median response on the Likert scale was 6 "really good," and the median response was 7 "excellent." 47.1% ranked the book illustrations as "excellent." One student had "no opinion" about the illustrations and 17.6% of the respondents believed the illustrations were "okay." No students ranked the pictures lower than "okay."

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insert table 4 here

76.5% of students indicated that they would like to read Sam and the Tigers again while 22.2% would not like to read the book again.

Little Black Sambo : Both the median and mode responses to assessing the illustrations in this book were 3 "okay." 36.9% of students thought the illustrations were "horrible" or "didn't like" them. Six students, 31.6% of students believed the illustrations were "pretty good," "really good," or "excellent." We also see a broad distribution of scores in this question.

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insert table 5 here

Though the evaluations of these pictures were spread along the scale, most students, 63.2% of the sample, would like to read the book again. 36.8% of students did not want to hear the book again.

Focus on illustrations

When asked to select the book they felt was best illustrated, 57.9% of students selected Amazing Grace and 36.8% of respondents chose Sam and the Tigers. No subject selected either Little Black Sambo or The Snowy Day as the best illustrated book.

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insert table 6 here

When asked to select the book that had the worst illustrations, 42.1% of students selected Little Black Sambo. The majority of respondents, 57.9%, selected a book other than Little Black Sambo as the worst illustrated. No one selected Amazing Grace as the worst illustrated book.

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insert table 7 here

We asked two open response questions during the final survey. The first question follows: If you had to mail one of these books to a white child in Vermont who had never met an African-American person, which book would you choose and why? A majority of students selected Amazing Grace as the book they would send (63.2%). When asked why they selected the book, one student wrote, "because that's the book with more information about the African-Americans." Another student wrote, "because that one had the best illustrations and it looks more like an African-American than others."

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insert table 8 here

Sam and the Tigers was selected by 5.3% of students, as was Yo! Yes?. No students selected The Snowy Day as the book they would mail, while 26.3% of the sample indicated Little Black Sambo as the books they would mail to the white child in Vermont.

The second open-ended question asked students which book they would choose when selecting a story to read to a younger relative. Amazing Grace was the most popular selection, but was not selected by the majority of students. 41.2% of students chose this book. 11.8% of students chose Little Black Sambo and Yo! Yes? while only 5.9%, one student, would read The Snowy Day. Sam and the Tigers was the choice for 29.4% of students.

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insert table 9 here

Students' criteria shifted when selecting books for younger family members as compared to selecting books for the previous "mail" question. Students demonstrated this change

when explaining their choices in written responses. One student showed understanding of varying reading levels when she wrote that Yo! Yes? would be her choice because "it is easy to read." Another student wrote that Sam and the Tigers is "a great demonstration for young family members." Students also referenced responses to a particular individual relative and their preference. For example, a student wrote that he would choose Little Black Sambo because "my cousin loves funny books..."

Cross tab comparisons between variables were generally unable to produce any significant results due to low cell counts. We did investigate the relationship between gender, reading level, and survey responses. Excluding male subjects, analysis of the "likebest" variable (which book students liked best) shows that female students prefer Amazing Grace (62.5%) and Sam and the Tigers (37.5%). No female respondents to this question selected any of the three other books. Male students preferred Sam and the Tigers; 45.5% of male respondents selected it as their favorite book. 27.3% of students selected Amazing Grace and another 27.3% selected Little Black Sambo. In addition, the three students who selected Little Black Sambo as their favorite book were all male students reading "at or above" grade level.

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insert tables 10-13 here

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative results are given by book in the order that books were discussed by the students. The results for each book are divided primarily along four or five major questions asked during discussion sessions with significant developments that fell outside of these questions reported in a final paragraph. Readers must note that though there was a uniform set of questions by which the researchers went (appendix C), discussion was

flexible enough for students to explore and share their opinions. For this reason, every question might not have been asked in every discussion group due to time constraints or the flow of conversation. However, great care was taken by the researchers to reach as many of the main questions listed in this section.

Yo! Yes?, Chris Raschka

Students generally were divided when given the positive statement reviewing this book which read, "A person that reviewed this book thought that it showed racial harmony and showed a black character and a white character sort of getting together and unified." Those who agreed responded that they believed that all blacks and whites should be together and show each other respect. For instance, several responses were as follows:

> "[I agree] 'cause I think all blacks and whites should be friends. They usually don't be friends because of different races."
>
> "I agree 'cause ... I think black and white children should be able to play together no matter what you are. Whatever your relatives say, it doesn't matter what color you are long as you're a human being and you treat people the way you want to be treated. That's the way."
>
> "They showed respect. They showed respect to each other. It didn't matter what color you were. It didn't matter what color you were long as you friends, and that's the best it could be. You can't change the color you is ... yeah they might have been saying yes and not words, but I don't thinks it's a problem long as they were getting along. As long as it didn't matter what color the skin was, they was getting along and everything was okay."
>
> "[I agree] because they didn't do any fussing and didn't do nothing of violence."

Students who did not agree generally were reluctant to say why they did not agree. One student who did share why he disagreed expressed that racial harmony could not be depicted by such a small number of people in a book. Pointing out there were only two characters, he said, "[I] don't agree 'cause it wasn't that many people in the book."

The next question dealt with the quality of the illustrations and was brought up by the students in each group following their responses to the positive statement mentioned above. When asked whether they thought the pictures were good or not, the majority of students felt the pictures were poorly done. Most often students cited the presentation of the African-American character and mentioned that they thought physical features were faulty. For example, students commented as follows:

> "They looked ugly ... look at his [black character's] hair. That don't look right. Look at their hair."
>
> "His head look like a peanut."
>
> "But his ears don't look right. It look like his shoes bigger than his feet."
>
> "I don't like the way he, he stick his chest up like. It's like making him look weird ... well for one, you couldn't halfway see his eyes ... you couldn't see fingers."
>
> "His head look like a watermelon."
>
> "[His hair] it looks fake. Yeah, it looks fake. It looks like a wig."

Students also mentioned that lack of detail was a problem. Detail was mentioned in reference to both the African-American character and the background upon which both of the characters appeared. For example, students responded:

> "The person that drew the pictures, he ain't take his time."
>
> "Look how many fingers he got, and look how they looking."
>
> "Look at that black mark. It look like his face, but it's really his whole body."

"He didn't do, uh, real good, I think. It's okay. It's okay. He could've had a better background. He could've had buildings around it or something."

"'Could've had more people or like stuff around him."

Students also seemed to connect their dislike for some pictures based on the actions of the characters in those illustrations and a discrepancy between the clothing each character was drawn wearing. For example, one student mentioned that he didn't like the pictures because "I think he [the white character] laughing at him [the black character] because he probably saying he dress better than he do." In addition to those aspects, students also stated that inconsistency in drawings were a reason for not liking pictures. On one such occasion, a student pointed out that the black character's shoes had changed from white to brown.

Students who thought the illustrator had done a good job had a variety of rationales. Two students commented on the choice of color and the type of clothing the characters wore. For example, some positive comments about the pictures were as follows:

"They was colorful. They were cool. They showed, you know, like different kinds of clothes."

"Yeah, they was colorful. They did a good job because they was colorful."

One student based his like for the pictures on the actions of the characters. He said, "[I liked] when they both jumped in the air ... it was more on friendship." Yet another student mentioned the shadowing the illustrator had done as a reason for liking the pictures.

Following further discussion, students were given the negative comment about the book which typically read, "another person that read this book said that the pictures were bad because they were stereotypes and the image of the African-American character in the book is not a good image, but a negative one." In each group "stereotype" had to be

defined for the students, and they seemed to be evenly divided in response to the statement. Students who agreed focused on the dress of the black character in the illustrations and stated that this image should not be restricted to the African-American character alone. For example, the following are typical student comments from those who agreed with the negative statement:

> "I think that all Black Americans do not [dress like this]. Far as I know, you could drive down the road, and you could see like different people ... different people wear baggy pants and they got, um, different cultures."
>
> "I think now everybody wear this kind of pants. They wore 'em where it's hanging all the way down to the legs and now they wear it where they wanna wear it."
>
> "I think the pictures was all right, but they was very, um, negative and stuff like that 'cause, um, white people, some white people wear baggy pants, white and black."

On the other hand, students who disagreed had a variety of reasons for doing so. One student commented, "[I disagree because] the pictures all right, but they [black character] just look like kinda' shaggy. He [the white character] look better than he do." Another student mentioned that the characters in the book should have autonomy over what clothes they wear. He said, "I think they can dress the way they wanna dress."

Following the negative comments, the discussion groups were asked whether they thought the pictures were realistic images and whether they knew people that looked like the characters in the book. Students overall were divided about whether the characters reminded them realistically of people they knew. For those who answered affirmative, the main person it reminded them of was a male friend or older sibling. For those who answered negatively, the reasoning was based on the detail of physical features.

The next to last segment of discussion asked students to speculate upon the racial identity of the illustrator. The first question of the segment asked, "do you think the illustrator is familiar with African-American people?" On the whole, students did not think this illustrator was familiar with African-American people, except one group which reached a consensus that he was familiar with black people. Students had a variety of rationales for saying the person who had drawn the pictures was unfamiliar with African-Americans. The foremost of these rationales was based on the physical features of the black character. For example, one student stated, "he drew the black person different than the other [character]," while another student mentioned, "because the black person, he look like he didn't have any eyes." Several other students answered the question very strongly saying that they thought the illustrator hated African-American people. When asked to explain why the illustrator hated African-Americans, students responded:

> "'Cause, um, he had a book and the black people, um, look like the ones, yeah, badder than the other people."
>
> "'Cause, um, the black person ... he had baggy pants on and the other one, he was all quiet and stuff, and the black person was, he was the loud one."
>
> "I want to say more about it because I think that he didn't like that man that much ... cause some [white] people are like that too. But, um, I believe he hated the black person, too, cause he tried to make the black person said all these bad things and the white boy he ain't."
>
> "The white boy, I think the white boy just like me. You know, not a lot like me, but he scared a lot like me sometimes. The black boy, like say the black boy was Danika buddy and ... he be talking to me and I be saying something scared like. I be saying something scared."

Conversely, students who thought he was familiar with African-American people stated the ensuing explanations:

"He probably saw some African-Americans people dressing like that, and he probably just took the idea of that."

"Yes [he is familiar with African-Americans] because, because he would've had more than just those two people up in there and more than just three or four words or one."

"Well, he might have some black friends, some African-American friends."

When students were asked specifically if they thought the illustrator was African-American, diverse responses were given. Relatively few students agreed that the illustrator was African-American with few or no reasons given for why they thought so. One student who did agree the book had a black illustrator stated, "it's just 'cause look how he drew his [the white character's] hair ... he look more African-American. I think he tried to make them equal ... like, see how the hair and stuff and the clothes and stuff." Several students felt that white people would not want to draw black characters. For example, one student said, "because, well let's say he was white. Well, he might not want to draw black people." For students who thought the illustrator was not African-American, the reasons centered around the quality of the drawings. One student said, "if you can't tell his [the black character's] face, I don't know."

An interesting development that came of this question was that instead of identifying the illustrator as white or black, most groups guessed that there were two illustrators of the book. They proposed that a white illustrator had drawn the white character and a black illustrator was responsible for the black characters. When directed that there was only one illustrator, the groups generally relied on the answer that the illustrator had to be mixed.

The Snowy Day, Ezra Jack Keats

The positive statement about this book read, "when this book was first published, it was praised and people said a lot of good things about it because it was the first time that a picture book had ever had a black character as the main character. It was the first time an African-American child was the subject of a good story." All four groups of students, after hearing the positive statement, wanted to immediately discuss the quality of the pictures in response--replies to questions about the quality of the illustrator's work will be discussed next. Direct reactions to the statement included students' shock that this was the first picture book published with the main character being African-American. Students generally expressed that it was not fair that this was the first picture book to have a main black character. Conversely, several interesting reactions were that several students remarked that that was not important because they had not yet been born and a group's assertion that the main character should appear grown in the book because it was published in 1962 and he should be in his thirties now.

Because of student remarks, discussions immediately began to focus on the quality of the pictures. Students thought the pictures were not drawn well for several reasons. Their opinions were based on the following criteria:

Inaccurate, undetailed, or non-existent physical features

"Well, guess I just feel, I don't like these pictures ... because they don't look right. They don't got no face on 'em."

"How come there's no nose or mouth ... You can't even see no eyes and stuff."

"I can't even make out if that's his hat or his real face."

"[I don't like] this one. This page right here with the woman on it 'cause she ain't got no face."

"This one he ain't got no toes ... I ain't never seen nobody with fingers like that."

Choice of color

"All I know is that those colors is ugly. You know like the ugly colors and stuff."

"[about highlighting colors in the snow] But they shouldn't have put that color in the snow."

"Snow supposed to be white. I don't get why it got purple on there and white."

Lack of realism

"I think they just phony. I don't like 'em ... Yeah. I know that's the way the illustrator wanted it. That's the way the illustrator wanted it to be. I 'on, I don't like it."

"They was fake ... un-hun. I think it was hoooooor-ible!"

"He look like a, he look like a monster."

Though the overall opinion was that the pictures were poorly done, several students pointed out pictures they did like. Of the students who did pick a picture they liked, the majority picked the same picture which depicted the main character and his mother both with fairly detailed faces. When asked why they liked the picture, students answered that they were drawn well and you could distinguish the face in that particular picture. Students individually selected other pictures they liked as well; their like for these pictures usually focused on the activity of the main character as it related to their own personal experiences as opposed to the criteria listed above. For example, one student commented that she liked the picture when the main character was making snow angels because she loved to do that. Another student expressed, "I like it, um, because he trying to get the snow down. That's what I always do when the snow came ... and I make tracks, and, yep, I make tracks in the hills ... me and my puppy." An additional student

said that he liked a picture because it was funny that snow had fallen in the main character's head.

When given the negative review of the book, students tended to agree. The statement contested, "the illustrations in this book are like white faces colored and are actually not good images of an African-American child." The students were initially confused by the imagery of "white faces colored brown." The initial comments in two groups were typically like the following:

> "[The negative reviewer is] definitely wrong. Definitely wrong ... 'cause it's not a white face you see here. He just colored it on to the picture, but if you color it like first ... you ain't gone paint it."
>
> [When the rest of his group said they agreed with reviewer] "Why do people keep saying that? That looks brown to me. That is brown."

Once the concept of what the reviewer meant was explained more concretely, students immediately began to mention the lack of detail of the physical characteristics of the characters when agreeing with this comment. Furthermore, one student remarked, "I think that person, what he said was true because you really can't see any difference. Well, you can in some of the pictures like when he, like on the first page you can see his hair and everything."

The questions which asked if the person drawing the pictures was familiar with African-American people and whether that was an African-American seemed to bring about a conflict as far as students' answers were concerned. Students concertedly agreed that the illustrator was not familiar with African-American people. However, many of the same students answered that they thought the pictures were drawn by an African-American. When asked why they did not think the illustrator was familiar with African-American people, students had similar responses. The rationales of these students

centered around how realistic and detailed the pictures were. For example, students said the illustrator was not familiar:

> "Because, I don't think African-Americans look like that ... African-Americans are [have] noses and lips and faces and"...
>
> "Because he don't draw 'em too well."
>
> "'Cause he didn't put a lot of detail into it."
>
> "He coulda' made the black boy look black."

Though each group definitely expressed these same sentiments, there were two or three individuals who disagreed without explaining why.

Interestingly enough, when students were asked specifically to decide if they thought the illustrator was indeed African-American, all groups decided that the illustrator was African-American. Students typically had a difficult time explaining why they thought the illustrator was African-American. Many proposed that the illustrator was mixed or that there were two illustrators when asked to talk more about their reasons for believing the person drawing the pictures was black. Students who did explain with more detail provided the following criteria:

> <u>The main character was black</u>
>
> "I think he [the illustrator] black because he [the character in the book] black."
>
> <u>Quality of the pictures</u>
>
> "Yes, I think he African-American because only a African-American would put like different colors in the snow."
>
> "I think he African-American. Because a black person writing the book, they just draw any way, but if it was a white person they probably take all the time."
>
> <u>Other</u>

"I think he might of [been black] to prove a point that all black people aren't like black, black sometimes. Like they are different colors."

In one rare occasion, a student in one of the groups maintained that the illustrator was not African-American "because might just be a white person, like you said, that just drew a body and then colored it brown." One other student declared, "whoever did the pictures could not draw."

Ending the discussion, two groups of students were asked if they thought this was a good book to be in the classroom. Both groups initially responded that it was not a good book for the classroom. The first group which did not think this was a good book for the classroom reversed their answer when asked to speak more about why it was not a good book. Students responded, "oh, I think the pictures are good, except for this one"; "I think the pictures are good, good, good"; and "oh, I think the pictures were fine." The one student in the group who still held their former opinion stated, "I think the pictures were not really good 'cause it's green mist in the background, and it might be, uh, pollution or something. Kids like that can't be in pollution. It might get in their lungs." On the other hand, the second group maintained the opinion that this was not a good book for the classroom. They did not articulate their reasoning other than the following two comments: "Man, it's just not a great book!" and "I don't think it would be because it got so much pictures instead of words." The latter comment is probably addressing the age-appropriateness of the text.

There were several other significant issues raised during discussion. The first of these is that several students said they were bothered by the young male character undressing in the book. One student mentioned, "how they took off his clothes and undressed him .. they shouldn't do that to him. The second issue was raised by a student who said in response to discussion "well, my opinion is that I think really what color to me doesn't matter, but a black African-American, it look like it's okay to have a black

person in the book. I'm not trying to be prejudice or nothing, but it look okay to have a black person up in the book for one more time."

Amazing Grace, Caroline Binch

The majority of students agreed with the positive comment about the book which read, "one person that reviewed this book said that it was very good because it showed realistic pictures and the main character, Amazing Grace, looked like a real kid. She could be a real kid that people know and see everyday." Students immediately pointed to classmates of whom they thought Grace, or other characters in the book, reminded them. In addition to naming students that bore a resemblance to the title character, students mentioned the detail of the pictures and that they were realistically drawn as reasons for agreeing with the positive review. Some of their responses were:

"I think she look like Danika."

"I like the book because it look like it's realistic ... yeah that boy in the back look like Thomas."

"[I like] the way they made the shadows and her face look like they're real good. I like how they did the color, especially on the cover ... the colors and stuff. I like how they did her face. It looks really, really, really good."

"I like the hair ... 'cause it remind me of my little cousin."

Conversely, there were two students in two separate groups that did not agree with the positive comment read about the book. Their reasons generally dealt with the quality of the pictures which will be discussed next. The comments of these two students were as follows:

"I disagree because it looks like it's a painting."

"I don't like the pictures ... Is that supposed to be a baby doll? Well, I thought it was a baby at first. It look like a baby. The cat don't look real."

Because of the nature of the positive comment, the students began to comment on the quality of the illustrator's work. Overall, the students felt the illustrator had done a good job on the pictures although several students, as mentioned above, faulted the work of the illustrator. For the most part, students who liked the job the illustrator had done mentioned detail and how real Grace looked as well as the ability of the illustrator to demonstrate the emotions of the characters in her drawings. Comments commending the pictures follow below:

> "She looks real. Look at the hands and stuff. The person who did it drew lines over it and stuff. I like the picture because it made the hands look real."
>
> "'Cause the kids on this page are well drawn."
>
> "I like them because the way it makes it look really, really, really, real ... because she look mad ... Mom's mad, grandma's mad, but like big mama, she always make things better."

The students who did not think the illustrator had done a good job concentrated primarily on the actions of the characters in the pictures they did not like, not particularly the quality of the work. For instance, student said that they did not like the pictures showing the other students in the class challenging Grace's desire to star in the play as Peter Pan. One such student stated, "[I don't like this one] because they are teasing Grace. Her and her, they look like they looking so mean." Other students focused on the fashions that characters were drawn wearing. Representative comments were:

> "I don't like the way they drew this one and this one ... the kind of clothes she got on. She got on 'high-waters.' "
>
> "Yeah, she look funny ... 'cause she just don't look right [with 'high-waters' on]."

Students' response to the negative comment were mixed. Interestingly, several students who were very vocal about how good the book was when responding to the

positive book review seemed to change their stances when given the negative comment. In at least two groups, the majority of the group shifted to concur with the comment given about the book. The negative review read, "Somebody else who read this book said they didn't like this book. They said the reason why was that there were a couple of pictures in this book they thought were stereotypical. They thought these two pictures right here [pictures of Hiawatha and Mowgli in which Grace is drawn topless and/or has on little clothing] how Grace is drawn in these particular pictures are very stereotypical representations of Native Americans and African-Americans." In order to respond, students needed to have the words "stereotypical" and "stereotype" defined. Students who agreed with the negative comment stated:

> "It show her body. It show her body ... for real, it is. I think, I know, I know if she was running around like that, people would think she was Mowbly in the jungle. She could at least put a little, like a little bikini shirt on."
>
> "Oh the clothes, man. She need some clothes on."
>
> "I don't like that one either ... 'cause the cat don't look real. And she need more clothes on ... yeah, in both of them."
>
> "You can't go in public like that."

Students who disagreed with the negative statement typically focused on the theme of the story, Grace's independence and the right to choose what she can wear, as well as the maturity of fifth grade students to see characters who are not fully clothed. For example these students commented:

> "It tells what you can do when you grow up. You can do it now while you a little child."
>
> "She can be, you can be anybody you want to be."
>
> "I wouldn't [say it's a stereotype]. Well, what do he think is a stereotype about it? That's they way it is in the movie."

"If that's the way she want to dress, you know, you dress how you want to dress."

"If you can have cuss words in it, why can't they have ... because we read books that have cuss words in 'em so I don't see anything wrong with that."

"Well, fifth graders know about this stuff anyway. It's okay at home ... well, in classrooms they shouldn't, in classrooms."

Following discussion of the second comment, students generally agreed, when asked if they thought the illustrator was familiar with African-Americans, that the illustrator had African-American friends or at least knew some African-Americans. While a small number of students had difficulty predicting the race of the person who had drawn the pictures, most students thought that the pictures were drawn by an African-American illustrator. Those who predicted that a black person had drawn the pictures focused on the way the illustrator had drawn physical features, the detail of drawings, and the realistic representation of the characters in the story. For example, one student remarked, "I know 'cause she drew 'em good. Um, like the hair, the old people hair, and the children's hair. They had their hair like that." Another student commented, "because of the way he made the shadow, and the way he made the face look really real." Those students who did not decide on the race of the illustrator stated that it was too hard a task. Others said they thought the illustrator was "mixed" or "bi-racial." In one case, a student responded that the illustrator was not African-American, but did not know why he thought she was not.

The next question asked if this was a good book to have in the classroom. All groups seemed to come to the consensus that this book was good for students in the classroom setting. However, one student pointed out that the book would best serve younger students (those below fifth grade) because it was "a easy book." Their answers

for why it would be good pointed to the illustrations as well as the story line of the book. Rationales included:

Quality of illustrations

"It's a good book ... [because of] the pictures."

Prior experience

"It *is* a book we have in the classroom, except for the anatomy part and all."

"We have it in our classroom ... because it tell about people can do anything they want."

Issues addressed in the text

"'Cause it teach you about racism and stuff like that. Like when Natalie said that about she black ... and when she said because you is a woman, Peter Pan is a man, you can't play it, see?"

"To learn things cause that's why you come to school. That's why it's a good book. 'Cause it tell you you can do anything if you put your mind to it and if you keep putting your mind to the same thing, you can end up doing good. That's some good stuff."

"Because of the way they made it like, like you can do anything you want to and having a nice, good spirit."

Reading level

"Yeah, like in a younger classroom ... because it's for beginners. It's easy."

Finally, students were asked to compare Amazing Grace to Yo! Yes? as far as the pictures were concerned. One student remarked that he thought Yo! Yes? had better illustrations, but this was not the opinion of the rest of the students in his or any other group. Otherwise, the groups felt that Amazing Grace was a better book with better illustrations. One student pointed out that the black character in Yo! Yes? was "back on

the black on the black," proposing that the character was too dark in hue to be realistic. Other students commented:

> "Well, Yo! Yes? got the pants hanging down and baggy like Thomas and all them."
>
> "Amazing Grace, definitely. Because they look realistic. The other book, he just, all he did was just scribble. The other ones [Yo! Yes?] were kind of bad. This one is kind of good."
>
> "The pictures are wonderful [in Amazing Grace] ... because there is more detail."
>
> "Because they look more like people, like a person you see daily."

Sam and the Tigers, Julius Lester

Students had mixed reactions to the positive review read about the book. The review read, "a person who reviewed this book said that they thought it was excellent because it's a remake of an old tale which people complained about because the pictures were very stereotyped and prejudiced, and they really liked this book because they thought the pictures were well done. The characters looked like real people, and they weren't clowns or to made fun of. They were real people, and it's a good story." In response, students began to discuss aspects of the story text such as all the characters being named Sam and the tigers turning into butter as points against liking the story. In direct response to the statement, however, students had little or no opinions. Students that disagreed commented:

> "Well, this little boy right here look like a clown [because of what he's wearing?] ... un-hun."
>
> "Well, right here he look like a girl."

Besides those comments, the positive review sparked little discussion from the kids. One student declared, "I don't know about the old story. I ain't never heard that old story ... I think, yeah, I like the story. I like the story though. It's the part with all the Sam, Sam, Sam, that."

When asked about how well a job the illustrator had done, students agreed that the illustrations were drawn well. When asked what about the pictures made them well drawn, students remarked about the choice of color and the realism of the drawings like the following:

> "It's alright ... the pretty colors."
>
> "[I like] how they are drawn."
>
> "Well, the picture and story describes what the people doing."
>
> "I like that picture ... because of their clothes and their sunglasses."
>
> "It just is [good pictures]. Like, um, um, it makes me think about like you're in somebody else's back yard."
>
> "They look like they were real."
>
> "Look like real people to me."
>
> "They do look like real people, but, I mean, they ain't got all the details, but they look like real people ... like on that other book we read ... yeah, Amazing Grace was just as much detail."
>
> "Um, I just, I think they okay. They cool. They okay. I like how they used detail."

Later, when asked if and why pictures were realistic, several students affirmed that Sam reminded them of family members or friends. Though the consensus of all the groups was that the illustrations were good, some students were very concerned later about color coordination of young Sam's outfit. One student pronounced very clearly, "I think they could have drawn him better ... them socks don't even go with that."

Students then reacted to the negative statement about the book which argued, "another person that read this story wrote something about it and said that he thought the character was a clown and not very dignified, not very respectable. They story makes this little boy into a clown." Although the metaphorical use of the term "clown" had to be explained several times, students on the whole disagreed with the negative comment. Their reasons were:

> "He ain't a clown because they don't say nowhere in the story or tell it nowhere in the story where it says he becomes a clown."
>
> "Well, he just running around. It don't seem like he going 'round acting bad to me. Like he was listening to his parents and stuff."
>
> "He just said, 'I believe I'm a big kid. I can pick out what I wanna pick.'"
>
> "See, I understand. I understand though. I wanna pick out my own. I'd like to pick my own stuff out. You know?"

Two students did say that they agreed with the negative comment, but for varying reasons. One student focused on the clothes he was wearing saying, "he need to get rid of those pants. He need to get some new shoes ... the pants? and the yellow shirt? That just don't go together." The other student based their agreement on Sam's action in the story. She said, "then he look stupid running around in his underwear ... well, that was kind of slow what he did. Kind of, you know, slow ... slow means that you don't think, think, think. You don't think before you do it." In addition, students were very disturbed by the fact that Sam, though not pictured without clothes on, was forced to run around in his underwear.

Groups were then asked the question "do you think the person who illustrated this book is familiar with African-American people?" All students responded affirmative with the following evidences cited:

> "Because, um, they drew 'em better. They drew 'em better with detail."

"I think that it show it [illustrator] is familiar with Afro-Americans."

"Well, through the clothes they wear 'cause African, African-Americans wear different clothes like we would."

"I think the author is familiar with, you know, African-Americans because of the way he dressed and the way they look."

" [Because of] their clothes. This the kind of clothes they wear."

"Like guys right here, some guys don't know how to dress right."

When asked if the illustrator was not only familiar with, but a member of, the African-American ethnicity, students responded that he was African-American. The typical justification for saying so was, "because ... stuff like, the, um, people. Like the other book [Amazing Grace], you can't really tell they fake." Such comparisons to Amazing Grace happened on several occasions.

Little Black Sambo, Helen Bannerman

Students seemed evenly divided in number in response to the positive comment about the book which read for the most part, "a person who reviewed this book said that she could not imagine a childhood without it. It was fun. It was hilarious. She thought it was probably the best children's book ever written, and no child should go without reading it." The divide between those who agreed and those who disagreed seemed to be dependent on the groups that the students were in. Students in the group usually reached a consensus about how they felt about the comment as opposed to there being differences of opinion within the group. Simply put, two groups primarily agreed with the comment while two groups did not.

Groups that agreed with the positive review did not give clear answers about their motivation for concurring with the positive comment. Some of these comments were:

"Yes I do agree, but no I don't cause that ain't the best book. I think it is one of the best books ever written, but I don't think it's the best children's book. I'd say no book in the world is the best children book. It's just *one* of the best ones. I think all of them are."

"[Do you agree?] Well, sort of yeah and sort of no."

"It good, good to read to little children."

"It teach you not to run around a tree real fast or you turn into butter."

On the other hand, students that did not agree with the initial comment given usually pointed to being offended and the believability of the story. For instance, one student said, "I don't think so ... well, look at how they said the people name ... that's offending. Yeah, real offending. Look at that. Little Black Jumbo, Little Black Sambo, why they gotta' be black?" Another student declared, "I think she wrong. I think she wrong 'cause there are better books than that book. Much better ... how can tigers melt up into butter? I never thought a tiger could melt up into butter."

Responses to the positive comment led directly into a discussion of the quality of the illustrations. The majority of the students indicated that they thought the pictures were bad. These students cited:

<u>Physical features</u>

"They look too black. I can't explain it. I can't explain it. I can't obtain it. I can't explain it."

"His [Jumbo] lips too big. His lips too big. They too black, and I don't think they would be that black."

"Their lips too red. I think their lips too red, and plus, I think he got on lipstick."

"She [Mumbo] look like a monkey though."

"Her [Mumbo] lips too big."

"He [Jumbo] look like a gorilla."

"There's a picture of the hair I don't like."

"I don't, I don't like how they drew the people."

"They blacker than black ... they need to stay out the sun."

"They blacker than black ... that's like the candy bar."

"He [Sambo] look so dark and his hair."

Color coordination of the outfits characters wore

"Why is his [Jumbo] clothes like that? Why he got read and green and orange and yellow and green and white and then he so dark skinned colored? Why did they name him Black Jumbo and he so dark skinned?"

Inconsistency in coloring of people, clothing, and/or setting

"'Cause on one page ... look at Black Jumbo right here. He light skinned than everybody else, but look at him right here. He so real, very dark and the only thing you can really see is his eyes, and that pink stuff they put on his lips, and then right here, they um, I ain't gone tell it."

"The boy [Sambo] shirt, it was white up there and kept, and it got darker and darker."

Feminization of characters

"They should've did better with the illustrations. He [Sambo] look like a girl. They should've made him look more like a boy."

"And plus, it look like a girl ... make him look like a guy."

"Un-hun, the boy, the boy, the boy [Sambo] that look like a girl."

Believability of pictures

"I don't like that one. I don't like the part when they turn into that butter."

When asked what they would change about the pictures, students responded:

"Give him more dressy-looking clothes and don't make him [Sambo] look like a girl."

"Make him [Jumbo] look like he got à neck."

"Get art lessons. That's the only way ... she need to draw better than that."

"[I would] make them more understandable ... more real."

"They shouldn't make them smile like that."

Several students disagreed with the majority to say that they liked the pictures. Students that liked the pictures pointed to the pictures of the tigers and their magical transformation. For example, one student remarked, "I like the part when they was spinning around and stuff." Another student stated that he liked the pictures because they made people look like monkeys, and that the pictures of the human characters were humorous. One such student stated, "'cause he look funny. He look like a leprechaun going on a date." Finally, when asked if the pictures that made people look like monkeys were realistic, one student replied that it was indeed realistic because "[it looks] like my cousin Jamal ... oh yes, he blacker than black ... the smile, the bones [are the same]."

On the whole, students agreed with the negative review of the book which read, "One person that reviewed the book, they thought this book was horrible, and they thought it was terrible because the pictures in it are very stereotypical. They say the pictures are negative and that they show African-Americans in a bad light." Although one group needed "negative" defined, students in all groups quickly responded to validate this criticism. Students replied in a variety of ways, including the following:

"Yeah, he [Jumbo] look like a pimp or something."

"If they had had a white person up in there, they probably would do better drawings of them."

"Yeah they would do better. They would draw 'em a little bit better, a little bit better."

"I think they could've lightened up the skin a little bit instead of having them that dark."

Moreover, students again mentioned that the characters resembled monkeys and/or gorillas and that the pictures were not realistic.

While in discussion, several students had difficulty agreeing or disagreeing with the negative commentary because they drew lines of distinction between "Africans" and "African-Americans." These students commented that the pictures were indeed accurate representations of "Africans in Africa." These comments were mentioned again in the next segment of discussion which asked students to hypothesize about the race of the illustrator and his familiarity with African-Americans.

When asked if the illustrator was familiar with African-American people or not, students were divided in terms of their groups. Each generally had a concerted response to each question resulting in two groups responding in the affirmative (the illustrator is familiar with African-Americans) and two in the negative. Student reasons for the illustrator not being familiar with African-Americans included:

"No, [she is not familiar with African-Americans] look at how she made African-Americans."

"Look, how she gone make Little Black Mumbo. She gone make a book like that? She ain't black, and she shouldn't write it."

"Oh I think [she's not familiar] 'cause them people don't look like [African-Americans]."

Students who thought the illustrator was familiar with African-Americans were reluctant to state why in most instances, but some of the reasons included that the pictures were accurate depictions of Africans and the way they had drawn the pictures.

Before the question about the race of the illustrator was posed, a student declared, "Who wrote the story? That's what I want to know. Was she white or black? She white.

You can tell." Following the above question about the illustrator's familiarity, students were asked to guess as to the actual race of the person drawing the pictures. Much like the familiarity question, students were divided when responding. Reasons for saying the illustrator was not African-American were as follows:

> "She wouldn't have wrote no story like that."
>
> "She would've did white people like that, or if she was black, she thought that white people are better than black people. But if she white, she made the black people so black so like they so black, black, black. I-I just can't explain it. Makin' 'em all black like that than anybody else and those messed up clothes ... she's definitely [white]."

Much like the former question, students who thought the illustrator was African-American were not clear as to why they thought so. However, some of the comments they made pointed to the fact that the characters in the book were accurate pictures of Africans. For example, one student responded, "I think so 'cause that's how Africans look when they live in Africa." Another student stated that from the way she drew the pictures, the illustrator had to be African-American. Distinct from the rationale most of the students gave for this answer, one student declared that Bannerman had to be black because "it's hard to come up with the idea of the names and stuff cause some people that live in Africa have weird names that you haven't heard of like black, black ... Black Jumbo, yeah."

Because of time restraints, two groups were not able to respond to the question which asked whether this was a good book to have in the classroom. It can be proposed that these two groups represented an accurate picture of probable reactions of all four groups because their opinions concertedly disagreed when asked to judge the racial identity of the illustrator, as well as when they reacted to the negative commentary on the book. Of the two groups who were able to answer this question, the consensus was that

this book was not a good book to have in the classroom. The rationale for this opinion were not given, but one student announced very emotionally, "I hate the pictures. I don't wanna never see the pictures again!"

Finally, students were asked to compare Little Black Sambo with Sam and the Tigers as far as illustrations were concerned. The groups unanimously chose Sam and the Tigers as a better book.

Discussion

Results of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis indicate that students liked Amazing Grace most and Little Black Sambo the least. Sam and the Tigers was favorably reviewed by students and was nearly as popular as Amazing Grace. The Snowy Day and Yo! Yes? were generally unpopular books with the students. Qualitative analysis provides a much fuller understanding of the ranking and selection responses to the surveys. Below the main findings of this study are discussed.

Ability to perceive images as stereotyped or racist

Both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that student preference tended towards Amazing Grace and away from Little Black Sambo. These preferences, however, were not based on evaluation of images as "positive" or as offensive. A number of students selected Little Black Sambo as their favorite book, as the book they would send to a white child who had never met an African-American person, or as the book they would like to read to a younger relative. While qualitative data offered many instances of students complaining about the look or design of images in Little Black Sambo and Yo! Yes?, there was little awareness of "offensiveness" or "negative" connotations drawn from the images. Students indicated attentiveness to "positive" images through their responses to Amazing Grace. Student praise for the representations, however, seemed heavily drawn from the intersection between the images and the text (the "message" in this story

is very overt). Had images been presented alone , without the text, there is only limited evidence that student praise for the book would persist. Response to the small group interviews suggest that student preferences were based on factors other than an evaluation of the images of African-Americans as "positive" or "negative" (research Q1).

Focus on realism

In answering the second research question, data suggests that the students used realism as the primary consideration when assessing the books lending support to Lambert's claim that "popular books portray the world of childhood much the same as children see it . . . " (1994:8). Students expressed dislike for and/or apathy towards books which they did not perceive as believable or relevant in relation to their own experiences. Overall weak responses to The Snowy Day support this conclusion. This was also indicated by complaints about clothing style, color-coordination of character outfits, and non-traditional use of color (e.g. the use of purple in illustrating snow in The Snowy Day). Furthermore, students heavily criticized The Snowy Day for having characters with faces that were not detailed and, hence, not realistic. Students also scrutinized Yo! Yes? and Little Black Sambo, not necessarily for lack of detail, but for exaggerated emphasis on specific physical features including lips, head size and shape, hair, and feet, as well as choice of clothing.

Developmental issues

Characteristic of early adolescence, students were highly sensitive to issues of peer influence. During discussion groups, students displayed a tendency to modify opinions and comments in accordance with the other students in the group. Students were constantly reminded that each individual's opinion was valid and that there was not a need for everyone in the group to agree or for the group to share a concerted opinion.

In addition to the above concern, students also demonstrated a concern for what they considered appropriate male sexual identity. For instance, students frequently

commented that they were disturbed by the emasculation of the young male characters in Sam and the Tigers and Little Black Sambo. For students, the apparent effeminate characteristics of the male protagonists represented a lack of skill on the part of the illustrators.

Perceptions of the illustrator

Illustration quality was the primary factor in determining whether or not the illustrator was "familiar" with African-American people. The illustrators of Little Black Sambo and The Snowy Day were overwhelmingly believed to be unfamiliar with African-Americans due to what students perceived to be poor illustrations. However, responses to the question "do you think the illustrator is African-American?" did not follow the same pattern and often contradicted answers to the "familiarity" question. For the majority of students, inclusion of and focus on African-American characters implied that the illustrator was also African-American. This correlation was not as strong as the first pattern, as demonstrated by the division among the discussion groups for Little Black Sambo. Two groups believed the illustrator to be white primarily due to the terrible quality of the illustrations while the others stated that the illustrator was African-American because the pictures were of Africans. Most students claimed that the illustrator of Yo! Yes? was white or were unable to answer the question. Several students suggested that the illustrator may have been "mixed." The limited number of characters and the inclusion of both a white and an African-American character seemed to make this a difficult question to answer.

Evidence of negative generalizations

Comments made by several students expressed negative stereotypes of both Africans and African-Americans. One student's claim that the illustrator of The Snowy Day was African-American because the pictures were so poorly drawn is troubling. Other students believed that the illustrations in Little Black Sambo were accurate

depictions of Africans. In addition, students connected dark skin color to poor illustration quality. Evaluation of images as "negative" was frequently linked to dark skin color. While these students could not define "stereotype," stereotypes have clearly already begun to develop.

Directions for further study

More research is needed, perhaps at varying developmental levels, to locate the emergence of critical ability. Younger students would less likely be affected by much of the peer influence that is so prevalent among early adolescents, while older students may demonstrate a more sophisticated ability to recognize and critique negative images in children's literature.

Student answers to the open response questions on the final survey varied based on who they were asked to choose for. Students did not always choose the same book to read to a relative that they chose to send to a white child in Vermont who had never met an African-American person. The data did not provide enough information to draw conclusions about this variation. Further study with a greater focus on selection criteria may provide some answers.

If this study were to be repeated, more discussion time should be allowed. An open-ended format, rather than the time restricted format in which this study took place, would provide greater opportunity for fuller student response. It has also been suggested that in order to obtain results with a greater focus on images, pictures isolated from the text could be used.

Implications for teachers and the classroom

What implications do these results have for both teachers and the students in their classrooms? First, some have suggested that our findings should be comforting because the students don't recognize racist, stereotypical images. On the contrary, these findings suggest a need for teachers intervention. While students are not yet aware of the entire

context in which these images are located, they often disliked the very same racist, stereotypical images. What are we ignoring as teachers if these kinds of student responses are taking place internally, in our own classroom, and we are not addressing them? Arthur Applebee cites the following about children's analysis of images:

> it is a long time before [children begin] to questions the truth of stories...it is specific characters and specific events which will be rejected, the recurrent patterns of values, the stable expectations about the roles and relationships which are part of their culture will remain..." (in MacCann and Woodard, 1985:4).

Second, teachers have a responsibility for the images in their classrooms. The results of this study should not scare off teachers who are just beginning to bring multicultural literature and materials into their classes. However, teachers do need to have some tools to analyze the images they are bringing in and to have that discussion with their students (see especially Lindgren 1991:176-178). Lastly, teachers should use picture books at the middle grades to talk about the power of images and the messages they carry. Without this kind of dialogue between teacher and students, there is no way of understanding what conclusions and inferences students are making about the images they see every day.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire completed after hearing each book, either before or after small group discussion

Name _____

Read the question. Then circle your answer. This is not a test. We only want to learn about your opinion.

Would you like to hear this book again?

YES NO

How much did you like the pictures in this book?

1 I think the pictures were horrible!
2 I didn't like the pictures at all.
3 The pictures were okay.
4 I don't have an opinion about the pictures.
5 I think the pictures were pretty good.
6 I think the pictures were very good.
7 I think the pictures were excellent!

How much did you like this book?

1 I think the book was horrible!
2 I didn't like it at all and I don't want to hear it again.
3 The book was okay.
4 I don't have an opinion about the book.
5 I think the book was pretty good.
6 I think the book was really good.
7 I think the book was excellent!

Would you like to read this book again if you had the chance?

YES NO

Appendix B: Final survey completed after all books had been read and all discussion sessions completed

Name: _____

Please rank all the books we have read. Put a 1 by the book you liked very best. Put a 2 by the book you liked next best. A 3 will go by the book you liked next. A 4 goes by the book you didn't like that much and a 5 by the book you disliked the most.

Yo! Yes? _____
The Snowy Day _____
Amazing Grace _____
Sam and the Tigers _____
Little Black Sambo _____

Circle the book that you thought had the best illustrations.
Yo! Yes?
The Snowy Day
Amazing Grace
Sam and the Tigers
Little Black Sambo

Circle the book you liked the best.
Yo! Yes?
The Snowy Day
Amazing Grace
Sam and the Tigers
Little Black Sambo

Circle the book you thought had the worst illustrations.
Yo! Yes?
The Snowy Day
Amazing Grace
Sam and the Tigers
Little Black Sambo

Circle the book you liked the least.
Yo! Yes?
The Snowy Day
Amazing Grace
Sam and the Tigers
Little Black Sambo

(turn to the next page)

Appendix B, continued

If you had to choose one of these books to send to a white child in Vermont who had never met an African-American person, which book would you choose and WHY?

If you had to choose one of these books to read to your younger brother or younger sister or younger cousin, which book would you choose and WHY?

Appendix C: Discussion script for small group sessions (individual book statements omitted)

Positive statement about book:
What do you think about that? Do you agree or disagree? What would you say to that person?

Let's talk about what you thought of the pictures. Do you think the illustrator did a good job with the pictures? Why or why not?

If you thought the pictures were well done, show me one you thought was good. Why did you think it was good?

Negative statement about book.
What do you think about that? What would you say to that person? Do you agree/disagree?

Were there any pictures in this book that bother you? Which ones? Why did they bother you?

Do the pictures remind you of any real people you know? Who do they remind you of? Why? How?

Do you think the illustrator is familiar with African-American people? Why or why not? How can you tell?

Is this a good book to have in the classroom? Why or why not?

Would you like your teacher to use this book in the classroom?

Do you think the illustrator of this book is African-American? Why do you think that?

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Table 1 - Student evaluation of illustrations in Yo! Yes?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	horrible	2	10.0	11.1	11.1
	okay	5	25.0	27.8	38.9
	no opinion	3	15.0	16.7	55.6
	pretty good	4	20.0	22.2	77.8
	really good	1	5.0	5.6	83.3
	excellent	3	15.0	16.7	100.0
	Total	18	90.0	100.0	
Missing	999	2	10.0		
	Total	2	10.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 2 - Student evaluation of illustrations in The Snowy Day

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	horrible	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	didn't like	2	10.0	10.0	20.0
	okay	9	45.0	45.0	65.0
	no opinion	1	5.0	5.0	70.0
	pretty good	2	10.0	10.0	80.0
	really good	2	10.0	10.0	90.0
	excellent	2	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	
Total		20	100.0		

Table 3 - Student evaluation of illustrations in Amazing Grace

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	didn't like	1	5.0	5.9	5.9
	okay	4	20.0	23.5	29.4
	pretty good	2	10.0	11.8	41.2
	really good	3	15.0	17.6	58.8
	excellent	7	35.0	41.2	100.0
	Total	17	85.0	100.0	
Missing	999	3	15.0		
	Total	3	15.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 4 - Student evaluation of illustrations in Sam and the Tigers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	okay	3	15.0	17.6	17.6
	no opinion	1	5.0	5.9	23.5
	pretty good	3	15.0	17.6	41.2
	really good	2	10.0	11.8	52.9
	excellent	8	40.0	47.1	100.0
	Total	17	85.0	100.0	
Missing	999	3	15.0		
	Total	3	15.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 5 - Student evaluation of illustrations in Little Black Sambo

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	horrible	3	15.0	15.8	15.8
	didn't like	4	20.0	21.1	36.8
	okay	6	30.0	31.6	68.4
	pretty good	1	5.0	5.3	73.7
	really good	2	10.0	10.5	84.2
	excellent	3	15.0	15.8	100.0
	Total	19	95.0	100.0	
Missing	999	1	5.0		
	Total	1	5.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 6 - Student selection of "best illustrated" book

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amazing Grace	11	55.0	57.9	57.9
	Sam and the Tigers	7	35.0	36.8	94.7
	Yo! Yes?	1	5.0	5.3	100.0
	Total	19	95.0	100.0	
Missing	999	1	5.0		
	Total	1	5.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 7 - Student selection of "worst illustrated" book

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Sam and the	3	15.0	15.8	15.8
	The Snowy Day	4	20.0	21.1	36.8
	Yo! Yes?	4	20.0	21.1	57.9
	Little Black Sambo	8	40.0	42.1	100.0
	Total	19	95.0	100.0	
Missing	999	1	5.0		
	Total	1	5.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 8 - Student response to: "If you had to choose one of these books to send to a white child in Vermont, who had never met an African-American person, which book would you choose?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amazing Grace	12	60.0	63.2	63.2
	Sam and the Tigers	1	5.0	5.3	68.4
	Yo! Yes?	1	5.0	5.3	73.7
	Little Black Sambo	5	25.0	26.3	100.0
	Total	19	95.0	100.0	
Missing	999	1	5.0		
	Total	1	5.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 9 - Student response to: "If you had to choose one of these books to read to a younger sister or younger brother or younger cousin, which book would you choose?"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amazing Grace	7	35.0	41.2	41.2
	Sam and the Tigers	5	25.0	29.4	70.6
	The Snowy Day	1	5.0	5.9	76.5
	Yo! Yes?	2	10.0	11.8	88.2
	Little Black Sambo	2	10.0	11.8	100.0
	Total	17	85.0	100.0	
Missing	999	3	15.0		
	Total	3	15.0		
Total		20	100.0		

Table 10 - Female student selection of favorite book

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amazing Grace	5	55.6	62.5	62.5
	Sam and the Tigers	3	33.3	37.5	100.0
	Total	8	88.9	100.0	
Missing	999	1	11.1		
	Total	1	11.1		
Total		9	100.0		

Table 11 - Male student selection of favorite book

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amazing Grace	3	27.3	27.3	27.3
	Sam and the Tigers	5	45.5	45.5	72.7
	Little Black Sambo	3	27.3	27.3	100.0
	Total	11	100.0	100.0	
Total		11	100.0		

Table 12 - Favorite book for students reading "at or above grade level"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amazing Grace	2	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Sam and the Tigers	3	37.5	37.5	62.5
	Little Black Sambo	3	37.5	37.5	100.0
	Total	8	100.0	100.0	
Total		8	100.0		

Table 13 - Favorite book for students reading "below grade level"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Amazing Grace	6	50.0	54.5	54.5
	Sam and the Tigers	5	41.7	45.5	100.0
	Total	11	91.7	100.0	
Missing	999	1	8.3		
	Total	1	8.3		
Total		12	100.0		